

Female Veterans Suicide Prevention Act Fact Sheet

Purpose

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs and metrics that are effective in treating women veterans as part of its annual evaluation of mental health services.

Background

The incidence of female veteran suicide is on the rise. A Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) study published in May 2015 found that female veterans commit suicide at nearly six times the rate of civilian women, and they are five times more likely to commit suicide than male veterans. A January 2014 update to the VA's 2012 Suicide Data Report found that the suicide rate in female veterans utilizing the VA health care system has also increased.

Over the last decade, the VA has undertaken major efforts to overhaul mental health and suicide prevention services to address the epidemic of military and veteran suicide, including improving mental health screenings, increasing access to care and providing more robust treatment services. Despite improvements, an average of 18 to 22 veterans take their lives each day—a statistic that has largely remained unchanged for more than a decade.

In response, Congress passed and the President signed into law the *Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act* in February 2015. This legislation requires a yearly independent third party evaluation of all VA mental health care and suicide prevention programs to find out what programs have been most effective in treating veterans. The annual evaluation—however—is not currently required to include gender-specific metrics applicable to female veterans, who now account for ten percent of the veteran population.

As the number of women veterans seeking mental health care through the VA continues to grow, a better understanding of which programs and practices are most effective in addressing their unique needs is critical to furnishing supportive mental health services.

Key Provisions

This bill would:

- Amend the *Clay Hunt SAV Act* to include specific metrics on female veterans in its annual evaluation of mental health and suicide prevention programs.
- Require the VA to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs that are the most effective and have the highest satisfaction rates among female veterans.

Support

The House companion bill passed out of the House Veterans Affairs Committee on September 17 and has the support of the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), National Military Family Association and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PAV).